

LEADERSHIP AND TEAMWORK PARADIGMS: TWO MODELS FOR BASEBALL COACHES

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Two popular leadership models were examined: transformational/transactional leadership and leader member exchange (LMX). The aim was to assess which model is the most appropriate to use when coaching a baseball team to build teamwork. While the transformational/transactional model was found to be sufficient to determine coaching behaviors towards the team as an entity and in inspiring the team, it was not found to address sufficiently the actual workings of the coach-player relationship. For this purpose, the LMX model was considered to be more useful. The LMX model also included more specific mechanisms for the improvement of teamwork than the transformational/transactional model.

Keywords: transformational/transactional leadership, leader member exchange leadership, baseball coaching.

Among the various theories and models pertaining to leadership and teamwork, two stand out when it comes to applying these paradigms in the world of sport: the transformational/transactional axis first described by Burns (1978) and later refined by Bass (1990), and the leader member exchange theory (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). The transactional/transformational leadership model is based on the notion that all leadership can be broken down into two contrasting approaches: the transactional leader works on the assumption that the goals and priorities currently in place are the right ones and what needs to be done is to put those

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properly into motion; the transformational leader works on the assumption that the status quo is no longer an option and a new vision is needed. According to Yukl (1989), *transformational leadership* is “the process of influencing major changes in the attitudes and assumptions of organization members (organizational culture) and building commitment for major changes in the organization’s objectives and strategies” (p. 174).

The leader member exchange (LMX) theory is based on the assumption that the type of relationship between a leader and followers can provide results more predictive of how an organization is doing than can traits or behavior studies. LMX theory examines relationships rather than individual leaders and followers, and looks at the linkages among people rather than simply the people themselves.

The contention explored in this article is that both transactional/transformational and LMX models can be used to examine the relationship between leadership and teamwork for coaches in the sport of amateur baseball. The former can be used to help pinpoint the style of leadership a coach needs to use when dealing with the team as an entity; the latter is suitable for dealing with individual relationships between the coach and the team members. However, in this article it is argued that the leader member exchange model is much more appropriate for leadership and teamwork paradigms for baseball coaches.

This is particularly relevant in Taiwan at the present time, as the country tries to redefine its role in the world of Little League baseball, as well as trying to increase participation in team sports at all levels. Coaching is the pivotal role in the creation of teamwork, and determining which type of coaching behavior(s) will be most effective in creating such teamwork is crucial for the success of team sports programs of all types, as well as for the creation of future leaders.

Bass (1997) listed a group of similar leadership behaviors he has observed, built around the transactional/transformational framework, which he considered the most widely accepted modern theories. For instance, House (1977) came up with the theory of charisma, Conger and Kanungo (1987) came up with the attributional theory of charisma, Kouzes and Posner (1987) came up with the concept of leadership challenge, and Sashkin (1988) described visionary leadership.

In a number of empirical studies the universality of the transactional/transformational paradigms have been demonstrated, for example, Avolio and Bass (1994) described how this leadership style operated with housewives active in the community, Avolio, Waldman, and Einstein (1988) described transformational leadership among students, Bass, Avolio, and Goodheim (1987) examined leaders of movements and American presidents, and Avolio and Bass (1995) studied organizational teams.

According to Chelladurai (1999), study of the concept of transformational leadership need not be confined to large organizations or political groupings. This type of leadership analysis can also be done with much smaller organizations.

A typical example in sport, is that of an athletic coach who transforms his or her team from a “perennial doormat” into a winning team. This type of coach begins by articulating discontent with the current image of the team, goes on to describe a vision where the team is performing in a winning fashion, and then convinces the members that the vision is attainable and they have the ability to be a winning team (p. 173).

In studies by Doherty and Danylchuk (1996) and Doherty (1997), these researchers examined the notion of transformational leadership in Canadian university athletics. In the first study it was found that the majority of the athletics administrators used some type of transformational leadership which worked its way down to produce a positive effect among coaches in the system; in the second study it was found that women and those who had more recently entered the athletic administrator ranks were more likely to operate by using a transformational leadership style than were males and older administrators.

TRANSACTIONAL AND TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

In a study conducted with a sample of participants in the South Africa cricket association, Ristow, Amos, and Staude (1999) it was found that the relationship between transformational leadership factors and organizational effectiveness was significant, and the relationship between transactional leadership and organizational effectiveness was not significant. They also found that the relationship between transformational leadership and organizational effectiveness was statistically significant for three factors: idealized influence, individualized consideration, and inspiration. Ristow et al. examined the question: “What does it take for baseball coaches to be able to use transformational leadership techniques in dealing with their teams?” According to Bass (1998):

Training and education in transformational leadership must promote self-understanding, awareness, and appreciation of the range of potential leadership behaviors used by both effective transformational and transactional leaders. It must go beyond skill training. It must be internalized and point to the extent that the best of leaders are both transformational and transactional but they are likely to be more transformational and less transactional poorer leaders (p. 99).

At the same time, some researchers have shown that it is not necessarily an either/or situation: many top leaders/coaches can act both transactionally and transformationally, depending on the situation and conditions. However, in order for leaders to be able to act in either of these ways, they themselves need to be

transformational: “The transactional leader works within the constraints of the organization; the transformational leader changes the organization” (Bass, 1997, p. 132).

One of the problems with transformational/transactional leadership theories is that it is difficult to explain how effective behaviors by transformational leaders are linked theoretically to the emotional states of those who follow them (in this case baseball coaches and the players on the team). Little is actually known about how such leaders influence emotional states. In other words, by using the transformational/transactional model one can grasp the overall picture of how such behaviors change an organization, but according to House and Aditya (1997), the particulars of those changes with respect to the actual individuals involved is a “black box” (a space for exchange between the two models):

Further, there is little evidence that charismatic, transformational, or visionary leadership does indeed transform individuals, groups, large divisions of organizations, or total organizations, despite claiming that they do so. It may well be that such leaders induce changes in followers’ psychological states, but these states do not continue after the separation of leaders and followers. There is no evidence demonstrating stable and long-term effects of leaders on follower self-esteem, motives, desires, preferences, or values (p. 445).

LEADERSHIP

In a study of the relationship between how leaders behave and the effect of their behavior on group cohesion in team sports, Shields, Gardner, Bredemeier, and Bostrom (1997) found that the greatest group cohesion results from a leadership style which excels in training and instruction, where the leader interacts in a socially positive way with members of the team, behaves as democratically as possible, and provides as much positive feedback as possible. The individual using this leadership style also avoids top-down decision making. Case (1998) used leader member exchange (LMX) theory to hypothesize that “in” members (starters) of a group of females at a summer basketball camp would score higher than “out” members (nonstarters) on the Leader Members Exchange Scale. The hypothesis was supported, and the results indicated that LMX theory might be useful in helping to determine the best leadership styles for sports:

A traditional notion of an average leadership style consistent for each member of an organization is clearly not supported. Instead, it is suggested that other factors and situations may exist which directly influence leader member exchanges. One dominant actor appearing to influence leader member exchanges is the phenomenon of role development that takes place between players and coaches (p. 392).

This relationship between coaches and players was examined by Carron and Bennett (1977) in a study to test the factors that determined whether dyads made up of intercollegiate coaches and athletes were incompatible. However, the results showed that an inclusive behavior was the main contributing factor. It was also found in this study that the one-on-one relationship between incompatible coaches and athletes was more likely to be caused by behaviors that were detached, withdrawn, isolated, more formal, and cold – on the part of both coaches and athletes.

In other studies on the types of coaching behavior that help create cohesion and teamwork, Westre and Weiss (1991), and Gardner, Shields, Bredemeier, and Bostrom (1996) found that five possible leadership styles used by coaches are (a) autocratic, (b) social support, (c) democratic, (d) training and instruction, and (e) positive feedback, and the only strategy or behavior that should be avoided is the autocratic. Similar results were found in a study conducted using participants at the Dixie Youth World series in 1998 (Bennett & Maneval, 1998). Bass and Avolio (1997) administered the Leadership Scale for Sports to 52 elite baseball coaches. The result indicated that coaches who gave positive feedback and used leadership styles including training and instruction, social support, and democratic behavior, achieved high scores, while coaches who behaved autocratically got low scores.

Turman (2003) examined the impact of specific coaching strategies and behaviors on team cohesion, using a two-stage methodology. The first phase consisted of the administration of open-ended surveys to 15 male and 15 female American college athletes who were asked to identify coaching techniques that either motivated them or made them less motivated. The second phase consisted of in-depth interviews conducted with 12 male college football athletes. According to Turman (2003):

The results from this study demonstrate the valuable role which a coach plays in the development of cohesion for his/her team. The findings suggest that athletes identified a number of techniques and strategies they felt deterred (inequity, embarrassment, and ridicule) and promoted (bragging, sarcasm and teasing, motivational speeches, quality of opponent, team prayer, and dedication) team cohesion (p. 99).

However, when it comes to specific coaching behaviors and their effectiveness, in the above study differences in cultural influences were not taken into account. For example, results of some studies have shown that, in the interactive sport team environment (for example, baseball and soccer), a complex combination of individual skills within a team context makes up the factors for team success (Misumi, 1992; Schwartz, 1990).

Ryska, Yin, Cooley, and Ginn (1999) sent questionnaires to 358 coaches in the United States and Australia and found that American and Australian coaches

used an athlete integration approach in interactive sports more often than in other sports, that is, the aim of those coaches was to ensure that each individual team member felt a sense of personal belonging and connection to the team. This makes sense in the interactive sport environment as success in this arena requires team cohesion. Ryska and colleagues observed “it is possible that these coaches realized that social cohesion has a greater impact on overall team functioning within the interactive sport and, hence, athlete integration strategies are used to enhance the social cohesion of their teams” (p. 536).

It can be argued that the studies described in the preceding paragraphs all fall under the leader-member exchange umbrella. In all these studies the ability of a coach to create a team in which every player considers himself or herself a member of the “in group” seems to be strongly connected to the team’s performance level – as originally pointed out by researchers such as Graen, Novak, and Sommerkamp (1982) and Vecchio and Gobel (1984) in the business organization environment.

According to Case (1998):

Studies completed in non-sport settings indicate that LMX theory may provide additional insight into these areas. If a coach can better understand the subtle exchange and role relationships that occur between himself or herself and an athlete who is a member of the “out” group, it may be possible for coaches to improve these relationships, and thus maintain higher retention rates so that athletes quit or leave the team. Similarly, a better understanding of the relationship between a coach and an “out” group member may lead to modifications that result in higher levels of player satisfaction and enjoyment with the sport experience (p. 393).

Through transformational leadership, coaches provide team members with spiritual encouragement, and motivate players with an attractive target to encourage team members to achieve the goal required by the coach (Falbe & Yukl, 1992). Transformational leaders can give individual members counseling with care and skill. To low-LMX members, transformational leadership behaviors can supply even greater benefits and promote the team members helping each other so that the relationship among team members is more harmonious (Sparrowe, Soetjito, & Kraimer, 2006), and when the teams identify shared goals they are also more willing to make every effort to achieve their goals, even at the expense of personal interests.

For example, when coaches and players operate with high levels of leader-member exchange, players would perceive a good working partnership between themselves and coaches, and would know how to perform better to satisfy their coach (Graen, Novak, & Sommerkamp, 1982; Scandura & Schriesheim, 1994).

It can be seen that in examining what kind of leadership style coaches should

adopt to promote the whole team's development, LMX has been found to be better for this purpose than either transformational or transactional leadership.

CONCLUSION

In this article it has been shown that both transformational/transactional and LMX leadership models can be used to examine the connection between leadership styles and teamwork/team cohesion. Both models provide a breakdown of traits and behaviors a coach should have and employ.

What differentiates the two models is the degree of fine tuning possible in each theory in order to arrive at a state where coaches can make use of the information provided so that their teams achieve better teamwork and cohesion. Judging from the examination of the various studies conducted under the two leadership paradigms, it is the view of this author that the LMX theory is more capable of refining to the point where practical strategies can be identified and utilized.

While this might be adjustment enough for an industrial, business, or other large organizational endeavor, in this author's view it is not enough to determine the specific strategies needed to create better teamwork and team cohesion among baseball teams being coached at the amateur level. The reason for this attitude is that while such studies do provide ways to improve on the team level (the team as a specific entity manipulated by the coach in the hope of achieving better and more effective performances), they do not provide insight into the interactions between a coach and individual players. In the transformational/transactional model, that seems to be a black box, the process being to insert transformational-style qualities and activities at one end, and come out at the other with teamwork to achieve cohesion-enhancing benefits.

Transformational and transactional leadership style is based on the assumption that the coach adapts a nondiscriminatory approach to all the players. But in fact, in the minds of players, coaches behave differently towards different players, showing greater trust and care to "in-group" players.

Coaches have to make every team member feel with absolute certainty that he/she has the coach's attention and trust so that the cohesion and morale of the whole team can be increased. Therefore, an important task for the coach is not only to teach players the skills to score, but also to establish the relationship among the players. Therefore, this author suggests that a coach should not use a single model of leadership, and has to use transformational or transactional leadership based on the nature of players to show players that the coach and players are like family, and none are outsiders.

It is noted that when using the LMX leadership style, coaches must avoid a rift among the players, and not let team members feel they are outsiders as

this undermines the cohesion of the whole team. As a result of the examination of research carried out on leadership styles in this paper, the author makes the following suggestions. First of all, in the past research was focused on what kind of leadership style the leaders of businesses or for-profit organizations should use. What kind of leadership style will help coaches lead the baseball team more effectively has not been explored. Therefore, this author encourages future researchers to examine the role of the effectiveness of the baseball coach and his/her leadership in the process of developing team effectiveness.

Second, the team cohesion level is the key to winning games, and highly-cohesive teams generally gain better competition results. The aim in this paper was to clarify what type of leadership style will help improve team cohesion, given that the leadership of the coach is a key factor in this process.

The LMX approach is much more complex and involves numerous coach-player dyads, cross-referenced with the coach-team dyad. The ability of the coach to maintain these dyads working on a level where every player feels included is an important key to success as a team. At the same time, there are a number of questions with respect to LMX theory. One of the problems is that interrelationships among the various dyads and the various levels of dyads can quickly become very complicated. Additionally, such relationships can quickly escalate and spiral out of control, for example, what exactly is meant by a high-quality relationship? It is the kind of relationship which supposedly leads to high relationship effectiveness. How do these high-quality relationships correlate to reports? How does the theory cope with the built-in bias of LMX when it comes to in-groups and out-groups, the favored and those not favored, the demographically similar and the demographically diverse?

These are research topics for future studies, but despite these problems, it is this author's opinion that the LMX model is more productive and fruitful than the transformational/transactional model as a means of determining effective teamwork structures for baseball coaches.

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